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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Sheikh Sharif Elected President

REF: Djibouti 88

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On January 31, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed was elected President of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. The first round of voting by the newly-enlarged parliament ended the night of January 30, with Sharif garnering significantly more votes than the other ten contenders. Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde" came in third place, one vote behind Maslah Mohamed Siyad, the son of former president Siad Barre. In a demonstration of statesmanship and political maturity, Nur Adde conceded the election and did not participate in the second and final round of voting. Four of the six frontrunners who would have gone to the second round also conceded, leaving only Sharif and Siyad in round two. Sharif went on to beat Siyad handily, 293 to 126, in second round. On early afternoon January 31, Sharif was sworn in as President. He pledged to unify all Somalis in a quest for peace and stability and to provide honest leadership. In his remarks, Sheikh Sharif offered special thanks to the USG for its support. In a pre-inauguration meeting, President Sharif welcomed USG support for a government of national unity. He echoed "Nur Adde's" earlier conversations with us in requesting USG support for the joint security forces. The new President also asked that we work actively to allay any reservations the Government of Ethiopia might have about his presidency. End summary.

Sheikh Sharif
By a Significant Margin

2. (SBU) With second-round votes counted at about 5:00 a.m., January 31, Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed emerged as the new President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). At the end of the first round of voting, Sheikh Sharif had emerged with a significant lead over his ten rivals. (Shortly before round one, three of the original fifteen candidates withdrew from the election.) The results of the first round of voting were:

-- Sheikh Sharif Ahmed - 215
-- Maslah Mohamed Siyad - 60
-- Nur Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde" - 59
-- Ali Khalif Galaydh - 31
-- Mohamed Osman Aden - 25
-- Abdirahman Abdi Hussein - 10
-- Ahmed Hashi Mahmoud - 9

-- Awad Ahmed Asharo - 5
-- Muse Moalin Yusuf - 4
-- Yusuf Omar Al Azhari - 2
-- Ali Hashi Dhoore - 2

¶3. (SBU) While Sharif emerged from round one the clear victor, he failed to win the two-thirds majority need to clinch the election on the first round. (Note: 425 MPs cast their ballots and there were three spoiled ballots which were discarded). According to the Transitional Federal Charter, the six highest scoring candidates proceed to the second round. Demonstrating statesmanship and political maturity, Nur Adde conceded the election during the interval between rounds one and two. Galaydh, Adan, and Hussein followed suit, leaving only Sheikh Sharif and Maslah Mohamed Siyad, the son of former Somalia President Siad Barre, to contest the second and final round. At about 5:00 a.m. (local), January 31, it was announced that Sheikh Sharif had won the election, with 290 votes to only 126 votes for Siyad.

Transparent
Election Process

¶4. (U) While some participants complained that the electoral process had been skewed by allowing the new ARS-appointed MPs to vote, there was no criticism of the voting itself. For both the first and second rounds, each MP was called by name to the front of the People's Palace where they were given a ballot which they completed in curtained voting booths in full view of the parliament, electoral committee, international observers, and the media. (The event was televised live by Djibouti television.) Each ballot was then placed in transparent boxes which never left the head table. During the five hours that the voting was taking place, the doors to the hall were locked and security restricted access. The Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Parliamentary Commission for Presidential Elections (PCPE) oversaw the process. Ballots were counted in full view of the audience. All of the election observers, including three from the Somalia Affairs Unit, agreed that the entire process was transparent.

Meeting with
Sheikh Sharif

¶5. (SBU) Prior to the swearing-in ceremony on January 31, Ambassador Yates and other members of the Unit met as the first representatives of the international community with President Sharif. Ambassador Yates congratulated Sharif on his victory and recalled that his good working relationship with Sharif had begun in early 2007. He indicated the willingness of the USG to continue to work with Sharif and his government to advance mutual interests, highlighting our significant support for AMISOM and the Joint Security Committee. Ambassador Yates encouraged Sharif to act quickly in implementing clear structures through which we can more effectively channel support. He also highlighted our massive humanitarian assistance, and hoped that security would improve so that it could become development assistance instead.

¶6. (SBU) Sharif in turn offered a warm welcome and thanked the USG for its full support of the Djibouti Process. He hoped that our bilateral relationship would become stronger, noting "We can achieve anything if we work together." Sharif promised to advance our mutual interests, without reservation and noted that he would spend the coming days in consultation about the appointment of a prime minister. Sharif asked for immediate support for joint security forces, declaring that his goal was to create one army, under one state. Every Somali who wanted to peacefully cooperate would be welcomed into the Djibouti process, he said.

¶7. (SBU) President Sharif told us that he would like to

see Somalia become a good neighbor in the region. Sharif requested USG assistance in developing a productive relationship with Ethiopia. He expressed gratitude for the USG's support of the Djibouti Process, the elections, and the people of Somalia.

The Inauguration

18. (U) Sheikh Sharif was sworn in as President in a ceremony on January 31 at a hotel in Djibouti in front of the Parliament, diplomatic community, and the media. Representatives from IGAD, the African Union, European Commission, European Union, Arab League, and Organization of the Islamic Conference focused on the historic nature of the occasion and the importance of Sharif's good leadership in ensuring the successful next phase of the peace and transition processes. Most of the speakers praised Nur Adde, in particular his statesmanship during the election. Ambassador Yates delivered remarks on behalf of the USG. He and Djibouti's Minister of Religious Affairs were the only country representatives invited to speak at the ceremony.

19. (U) President Sharif's inauguration remarks highlighted many of the themes he had touched on in his earlier meeting with Ambassador Yates. In his remarks, he thanked in particular Djiboutian President Gelle and the United States for their support.

Comment

10. (SBU) Sheikh Sharif's landslide victory was made possible by the discipline of newly-appointed ARS MPs, unhappiness among some TFG MPs with Nur Adde's decision to expand the Parliament and award two hundred seats to the ARS, as well as the former Prime Minister's lackluster campaign. Also undercutting Nur Adde was continued unhappiness among some of the Darod with President Yusuf's forced resignation, and the failure of Nur Adde to reach out to Darod clan members in the aftermath of Yusuf's departure.

11. (SBU) Maslah Siyad's decision to wage a longshot battle for election in round two, according to his advisers, was motivated by the hope that he could somehow collect all of the votes that had gone to all candidates except Sheikh Sharif in round one, and use his Marehan credentials to cause defections among Darod MPs who had cast their votes for Sheikh Sharif. In the event that strategy failed, Siyad hoped that a strong showing in round two would give him a better hand in negotiating for positions in a Sharif government. Neither outcome occurred and Sheikh Sharif was handed an even more convincing victory in round two.

12. (SBU) Conversations with Ethiopian representatives on the margins of the elections suggest that Sheikh Sharif's concern about the GoE's reaction to his election is not misplaced, and that efforts by the USG to allay any GoE would be useful.

Ranneberger